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The use of English in Dutch text messages as a function of communicative constraints

Aafke Lettinga, Carel van Wijk & Peter Broeder

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Abstract

The influence of English on other languages such as Dutch is still growing. But how does this influence show up in actual day to day verbal behavior? A promising domain to study this issue is texting by young adults. How often and in what ways do they use English in their digital messages? Are there context factors at work that make them rely less or more on English? In an experimental study the influence of two pragmatic factors has been assessed: social distance and subjective costs. How familiar is the sender with the receiver, and how intrusive is the message? In response to four sketches of a communicative situation, 38 young adults composed in all 148 text messages. Both pragmatic factors proved to be effective. English words and phrases were used most often in communicating with peers for a 'light' reason. When addressing more senior receivers with a rather intrusive message, English was used far less. In the undemanding situation English features outnumbered the Dutch ones; in the more demanding situation this pattern was reversed, now the Dutch features were the more frequent ones. The use of English showed a positional effect as well: it occurred for the most part at the beginning and ending of the message, leaving the core content almost untouched. Each of these effects shows that texters take into account several pragmatic considerations. If English is becoming an integral part of Dutch text messages, it seems to do so in a deliberate way.

Keywords: netspeak, texting, WhatsApp, pragmatics, language borrowing, code switching, young adults

1 Introduction

Just like plants and animals, languages tend to migrate. They do so for several reasons, among them commercial, technological and demographic ones. The entrance of exotic species, however, is not always appreciated: they may enrich nature but they may also lead to ecological disasters. In the linguistic world one sees the same dualistic response to mixing with and borrowing from other languages.

In the last decade, this discussion has revolved – both in news media and academia – around a rapidly growing new form of communication: texting, that is, using a digital device to compose and send messages. This can be done both phone- and internet-based with services such as SMS, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. These digital facilities came with rather dramatic changes in the conventional aspects of language, resulting in a language variety most often referred to as *netspeak*, a term coined by Crystal (2001, 19): a collection of words, idioms, and peculiarities of spelling and grammar that are characteristic of digital communication. For non-English languages this list has to include language mixing as well; ‘there is no doubt that the code-mixing of English and native textisms is a major feature of the international texting scene’ (Crystal, 2008, p. 131).

Initial reactions to this *netspeak* took a rather negative point of view, either highly rejective (*I h8 txt msgs: How texting is wrecking our language*; Humphrys, 2007), more doubtful (*Txting: the end of civilization (again)?*; Carrington, 2005, or rather cautiously (*R u txting? Is the use of text speak hurting your literacy?*; Drouin & Davis, 2009). It did not take very long, however, before this position was changed for a more positive approach (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008). ‘Texting is not a problem to be eradicated and textism use is not an affliction or affection which ‘should not be tolerated’ (Wood, Kemp & Plester, 2014, p. 101). Some push the line even further and consider *netspeak* as a promising development in the ongoing processes of language change (*Gr8 Txtpectations: the creativity of text spelling*; Shortis, 2007).

In this paper we provide additional evidence for this optimistic stance. With experimentally elicited text messages we have tested the conjecture that although forms, meanings, and origins of words and phrases may look unconventional, their actual use depends on well-known pragmatic factors normally found in non-digital modes of verbal communication. Results reported here will touch on text message features in general, but much of the discussion will concentrate on one specific aspect: the use of words and phrases borrowed from English.

1.1 Is English taking over?

In Dutch, vocabulary seems to grow notably through foreign influences. The official guide for the spelling of Dutch words, the so-called *Groene Boekje* ('green booklet'), illustrates this development clearly. Permentier (2015) sampled randomly 1000 words from the list of words added as new entries in the most recent 2015 edition. He found that 162 of them were of English origin. Through their inclusion in this guide these words have to be considered Dutch. Such a decision does not come without protests from native speakers. The website *Op-en-Top Nederlands* presents Dutch alternatives for a (still growing) list of 7000 'unwanted' English loanwords going from *accountant* to *zero-tolerance* (see <http://vindpunt.nl/vindpunt.php>).

This dominant influence on our Dutch dictionary does not imply a similar development in our everyday verbal behaviour. Van der Sijs (2012) made a comparison between newspaper pages dating from 1994 and 2012. In the list of types, that is, the list of unique words, she found that the percentage of English words had risen from 2.3 to 3.7. In the list of tokens, that is, the list of all words, English accounted for a meagre 1.5 per cent only. Van der Sijs concluded: On a printed page of 500 words you will find on average seven words borrowed from English, a result that is hard to call 'an invasion of English'. Above this, most words came from a rather restricted list that sounds very familiar, even to native Dutch speakers (*lobbyist*, *make-up*, *script*). The acceptance of these words also follows from their conversion to Dutch spelling (*songtekst*, *succesvol*) and even their full translation (*mouse click* has become *muisklik*).

Although it seems quiet on the printed front, the picture may be very different in the field of digitalized communication. Modern devices and media bring with them a vernacular that takes a lot of its elements from English. A simple Google search for WhatsApp messages returns numerous examples of English words and phrases as integral parts of Dutch sentences (see (1)). Some of them function as full comments (*Point taken*, *Help me out*), others as replacements of a Dutch term (*pride*, *cool*, *basic*). Also present, but harder to find, are abbreviations and non-standard spellings (*wtf*, *thnx*).

- (1) Kan wel een beetje *pride* hebben
 ('can have a bit of pride')
Help me out wat zijn het *wtf*
 ('help me out, what are they, what the fuck')
Yeah cool dat is wel *ok*
 ('yeah cool that's okay')

Point taken. Dat wordt een korte avond :-)
 ('Point taken. It will be a short night :-')
 Hahhh, *you crack me up, boy*
 Haha *thnx!* Lekker *basic* hahaha
 ('haha thanks! Nicely basic hahaha')

1.2 What makes English popular?

Over the centuries many languages have left their mark on the Dutch language, most notably Greek, Latin, German and French. Since the Second World War this influence is coming predominantly from English. The American way of life with its fast food and pop music, jeans and T-shirts together with a massive flood of electric and digital devices (from mixer and tuner to computer) has had a tremendous influence on the way we nowadays speak Dutch. Over the years several explanations have been given for this acceptance of English words and phrases. They can be characterized as either linguistic, social, or historical.

A linguistic explanation has been given by Bakker (1987). He listed ten arguments for adopting words from English (see (2)). They all come from the traditional lexicographical repertoire and show how English may contribute to the depth and specificity of the Dutch lexicon.

- (2) 1. Absence of a Dutch equivalent: *jet lag*, *groupie*, *pudding*, *mountain bike*
2. Need for variation: *goal* and *doelpunt*, *mix* and *mengsel*, *team* and *ploeg*
3. Need for a euphemism: *single* and *claim* instead of *alleenstaande* and *vordering*
4. Need for a shorter term: *copier*, *sale*, and *drugs* instead of *kopieerapparaat*, *uitverkoop*, and *verdovende middelen*,
5. Need for syntactic flexibility: *split-level* has as translation a complex description: *met vloeren die een halve verdiepingshoogte ten opzichte van elkaar verspringen*, the same with *stake holders* and *off-shore*
6. Need for precision of meaning: a *tube*, a *loser* and a *smile* are more specific than a *buis*, a *verliezer*, and a *glimlach*
7. Need for extension of meaning: *parking*, *design* and *comedy* are broader than *parkeerplaats*, *ontwerp* and *komedie*
8. Intensifying with a metaphor: *brainstorm*, *head-hunter*, *baby boom*, *diehard*
9. Intensifying through sound features: *big bang*, *kick*, *power*, *pep*, *moon boots*, *baby boom*

10. Intensifying through connotations: *in the mood, a feel good movie, highlights, best practices*

A social explanation was suggested by De Raaij (1997). He mentioned five motives (see (3)). The first three contribute to impression formation; they provide pieces of information that help to form a global impression of the sender. The last two have a more rhetorical ground; they refer to properties of the message itself.

- (3) 1. To make something more interesting.
 2. To look more intelligent.
 3. To sound better.
 4. To blur the meaning of a word.
 5. To by-pass Dutch spelling peculiarities

Finally, a historical explanation has been discussed by Crystal (2008). He gave two reasons for the tempting force of English. Over the last few decades, English has reached the status of a global lingua franca: it has become the code for most international communication. Second, the UK was quick to adopt the new technology, 'so it has had longer for its texting conventions to evolve and spread' (Crystal, 2008, p. 131).

Explanations for the attraction to English in text messages, generally appear to concentrate around social motives. Adolescents and young adults use English to express their feelings and to organize their in-group social world; even when they communicate in Dutch, they *party*, have *dates*, give *hugs*, and feel *pissed off* (De Decker & Vandekerckhove, 2013). By having their own 'code' they share a sense of community and enhance their idea of identity (Lange, 2015). Crystal (2008, p. 93) called characteristics of text messages both 'an index of belonging' and an 'index of prestige'.

This communicative behavior of young people makes the domain of texting messages, posting comments, writing blogs, and exchanging WhatsApps a very promising field to study the acceptance of English in Dutch. Such a study needs to take into account, however, that for many users these verbal exchanges come with uncertainties about conventions. How, where and when to use these texting features? Constantly, haphazardly, strategically? Three factors may lead to feelings of digital uncertainty. First of all, these facilities are still new. People have to find their way with them like they once had to do with the typewriter, telegraph and telephone (Baron, 2000). Second, these facilities tend to invite a rather informal type of language. But how far can one stretch the colloquial tone? Third, these

facilities are used by people of all ages and from many backgrounds. They attract far more users than ever have been writing letters or keeping diaries (Wood, Kemp & Plester, 2014). How (il)literate are they? How familiar are they with the conventions of standard language? These factors imply that empirical studies in the domain of text messaging have to pay explicit attention to the sampling method, the selection of participants.

1.3 How digital media affect language use

The use of phone- and internet-based services to communicate has led to 'netspeak' (Crystal, 2001, p. 19). It denotes a language variety to be found in all kinds of written exchanges of verbal messages. Very often these exchanges happen in an interactive way. Receivers respond at short notice. De Decker (2015) proposed three basic motives underlying netspeak:

- Write the way you speak. The language used in texting 'relies on characteristics belonging to both sides of the speech/writing divide' (Crystal, 2001, p. 31).
- Write short and concisely. Physical properties of digital devices (buffer size, small screen, unhandy keyboard) invite to leave out redundant elements as much as possible.
- Add para-linguistic cues. Try to compensate for the absence of prosody and facial expressions.

On the basis of these 'directives' netspeak has been developed. This has led to much-discussed instances of gobbledygook. Take for instance the text presented in (4). For most of us it will demand some effort to recognize that it spells the *Lord's Prayer* ('Our Father in heaven' et cetera; <http://www.shipoffools.com/features/2001/RFather.html>). These extravagant examples obscure the fact that from a certain perspective netspeak is not really something new. 'Texting may be using a new technology, but its linguistic processes are centuries old' (Crystal, 2008, p. 27). Borrowing words, changing meanings, shortening forms, intensifying expressions; they all constitute of old the ways along which the lexicon develops.

- (4) dad@hvn,ur spshl.we want wot u want&urth2b like hvn.giv us food&4giv r sins lyk we 4giv uvaz.don't test us!save us!bcos we kno ur boss,ur tuf&ur cool 4 eva!ok?
 ('dad at heaven, you are special. We want what you want and earth to be like heaven. Give us food and forgive our sins like we forgive others. Don't test us! Save us! Because we know you are boss, you are tough and you are cool forever! okay?')

The last two decades many authors have discussed various elements of netspeak (for an early example see Androutsopoulos, 2000). Extended inventories are presented in Crystal (2008, p. 37-62) and Lyddy, Farina, Hanney, Farrell, and O'Neill (2014). All of these suffer from two drawbacks. First, they limit themselves to list-wise presentations of typical exemplars. Second, attending to English only they have forgotten about code-mixing and other lexical transformations (Crystal, 2008, p. 131). A more systematic and comprehensive inventory has been proposed by Den Ouden and Van Wijk (2007). Their scheme is presented in Figure 1. It places netspeak in the broader perspective of youth language. Although some characteristics seem to be unique for texting, many of them are shared with other communicative contexts and media. Even the hallmark features of texting, the orthographic ones, did already appear in written versions of rap lyrics before text messaging had started (Olivo, 2001). The same applies to the much cherished emoticons; they have their ancestors in ancient Egypt (Van der Moezel, 2016). And already a century ago comic books presented soundspellings like *eeek*, *boo!* and *eh?* Actually there is not that much original to netspeak. As Crystal (2008, p. 27) stated: the linguistic processes in texting 'are centuries old'. So, the scheme in Figure 1 brings together all kinds of features found in text messages. Their combined appearance in a verbal message helps to identify it as a text message. In other words none of these features is unique for text messaging, but taken together they are characteristic for it. Their combined occurrence defines the genre, so to say.

Text message features come in three categories: lexical, orthographic, and iconic. Within each category several classes have been distinguished, in all eleven. Each class is illustrated with a number of specific cases (for more examples, see De Decker, 2015). Lexical features are represented by four classes. Of these, one is of specific interest for the present discussion: 'to borrow a word'. For orthographic features two subcategories are distinguished: they are based either on pronunciation or on spelling. The 'sound-spell' cases contain both ordinary words and 'non-words': emotional markers added to a sentence such as *argh*, *oops*, and *yuck* (for an inventory, see <https://www.vidarholen.net/contents/interjections/>). Iconic features encompass two classes. Within symbols a distinction is made nowadays between emoticons and emoji's; the first being typographic displays of a facial expression, the latter an actual picture of any object (compare :-) with 😊).

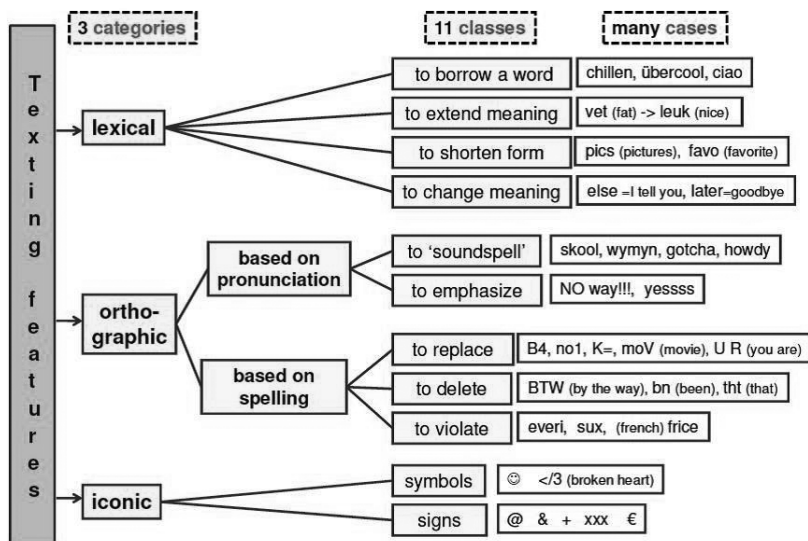


Figure 1 An inventory of text message features (Den Ouden & Van Wijk, 2007)

Because senders of text messages have freed themselves of regular written language when it comes to spelling, grammar, and lexicon, they may start to treat their language in a highly creative manner. Some even consider anarchistic behavior as typical. Baron (2008, p. 169) calls it 'linguistic whateverism': 'Its primary manifestation is a marked indifference to the need for consistency in linguistic usage. At issue is not whether to say *who* or *whom*, or whether *none* as the subject of a sentence takes a singular or plural verb, but whether it really matters which form you use' (emphasis in original). The rules of regular spelling, grammar, and word usage do not apply as long as the message stays comprehensible. This relativistic position has raised some concerns about the kind of literacy that will come from it.

Psychologists, sociologists, health specialists, journalists, and educators have had plenty to say; but hardly any reports provide details of what exactly happens to language when people create texts. As a result, a huge popular mythology has grown up, in which exaggerated and distorted accounts of what youngsters are believed to do when they text has fuelled prophecies of impending linguistic disaster. (Crystal, 2008, p. 7)

Up till now empirical research has nuanced the discussion considerably and given support for more optimistic expectations (see e.g., Wood, Kemp

& Plester, 2014). For the specific case of using English words and phrases, De Decker and Vandekerckhove (2013) reported that in chats of Flemish youth the larger part of their verbal code was still in Dutch although they inserted English words and short phrases regularly. This produces 'mixed' sentences like *'wie is er into een trashy horrorfilmmarathon?'*, but they are far less frequent than some seem to fear, according to the above citation of David Crystal (for more information on frequency analyses, see Lyddy et al, 2014).

The tendency to insert English terms and expressions has been explained mainly from a social perspective, as an in-group phenomenon of young people. This implies that they use English specifically in their communication with peers. This claim is tested experimentally. To check whether apart from social distance other determinants may be at work as well, a second factor was added: the content of the message. To what extent does the use of English also depend on the intrusiveness of the message, that is, the subjective costs it brings?

1.4 Research questions

This study was designed to test in an objective way an informal observation made by David Crystal (2008, p. 58): 'texting forums already provide anecdotal evidence that many texters are well aware of differences in their audience and are capable of adapting their messages to suit. Some contributors say they avoid using text abbreviations when texting parents.' However, on the other hand 'it is clear from the websites that offer guidance about texting that many texters don't take the needs of their audience into account at all, and haven't developed a sense of appropriateness' (ibid., p. 59). Apparently two opposing directions may be discerned, thus handing arguments to both the optimist and the pessimist.

In order to decide between the two perspectives a production task was designed in which two communicative constraints were varied systematically. This will force writers to take into account the appropriateness of their texting behaviour with differing degrees. Although we will report some results of texting behaviour in general, the focus of this paper is on results relevant for the discussion on the influence of English. The questions being pivotal, are: '(1) How do Dutch senders use English in their text messages?', and '(2) Does their use of English depend on aspects of the communicative situation?'. For the second question the hypothesis is formulated that the use of English would decrease the more intrusive the message and the less familiar the receiver.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

Participants were native Dutch students taking a photography programme at a school for *Middelbaar BeroepsOnderwijs* (MBO, intermediate vocational education). They were sampled for three reasons: (1) they were experienced users of a mobile phone, (2) they were active practitioners of text message features, and (3) they had a sufficient proficiency in English. In all 38 students participated, 16 males and 22 females. Their age ranged from 18 to 23 and was on average 20.1 (sd 1.48). The task was administered in two groups during regular class hours and took about fifteen minutes.

2.2 Materials

Each participant was asked to produce four text messages on the basis of instructions in which two factors were varied independently of each other: subjective costs and social distance. They noted their messages on a photo of a mobile phone with a grid projected on the screen containing 160 cells. None of the participants reported to feel hindered by this format, and as examples (5) to (7) may show, they felt quite comfortable with the task.

The first factor, subjective costs, concerned the intrusiveness of the message: rather low (an invitation) or much higher (a cancellation). Both situations were sketched in descriptions of about 175 words that explained the reason for sending a message (a festival, an illness) together with specific information about the event or appointment. These instructions provided ample material for the writers to include as content in their message. Thus, they could focus on presentation aspects of the message.

The second factor, social distance, concerned the relation between sender and receiver: rather close (a friend) or more distant (a teacher). The characters were introduced with a description of about 45 words that mentioned their name, how 'you' have come to know them, and why 'you' feel sympathy for them. These instructions stressed the difference in social position the sender had with the two receivers (in terms of age, power, and responsibilities); on an emotional level the sender related with both receivers on a comparable level, both were introduced as familiar and involved partners.

In all, 148 text messages were written. Most participants wrote all four texts; only two of them stopped halfway handing in two texts instead of four. The messages differed considerably in length and content as well as in the production of text message features, i.e., language use that deviates from the generally accepted standard for Dutch writing. Examples are

given under (5) to (7). They are representative for the range found in the number of words and text message features. The English translations are added to clarify the content and style of the messages; they do not contain all the text message features of the Dutch original.

- | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|
| (5) | Invitation teacher
Social distance: large
Subjective costs: low | Hee arie, Dat is lang
geleden! Hoe is het met
je? Dankzij jou doe ik
mee aan het schoolfesti-
val. het word echt zo tof!
Daarom wil ik je uitnodi-
gen op 3 maart van 19
uur tot 2 uur om te
komen kijken. mijn broer
doet mee met zn bandje!
echt ook super leuk. zie
je dan! groet. P.S. : Gratiz
entree! | Hii arie, It's been a long
time! How are you
doing? Thanks to you I
am participating in the
school festival. It's really
going to be so awesome!
That is why I want to
invite you on march 3 rd
at 19 o'clock till 2 o'clock
to come watch. my
brother is participating
with his band! Also really
super fun. see you then!
greet. P.S.: Free entrance! |
| (6) | Invitation teacher
Social distance: large
Subjective costs: low | Heej ARIE!! ga je mee
naar festival!? Doe mee
man word supercool! 3
maart 7 uur tot 10 uur.
theater op school! zie je
dan!!
laterz | Hii ARIE!! are you com-
ing to festival!? Join us
man going to be super
cool! 3 march 7 o'clock
till 10 o'clock. theatre at
school! see you then!!
later |
| (7) | Cancellation friend
Social distance: small
Subjective costs: high | He babe =) kben ziek >_<
vind t egt klote maar kan
er niet zijn... Blijf maar in
m'n bed ligge maar
hopelijk tot snel kus nick | He babe =) I am sick >_<
think it really sucks but I
can't be there... Will stay
in my bed but hopefully
see you soon kiss nick |

2.3 Analysis

Each message has been analyzed for the occurrence of the text message features summarized in Figure 1. The features come in three categories: lexical, orthographic, and iconic. Since English in texting is the topic under consideration in this paper, iconic features are not discussed here. However, all lexical and orthographic features have been classified as either English or Dutch in origin.

With respect to the annotation of features in the texts two preliminary

remarks need to be made. First, a single word may belong to several texting categories. Representative examples are given in (8). These words are borrowed from English, have violations in spelling, and show deletions of letters. Second, an originally English word may have become a common word in Dutch. For instance *weekend*, *computer*, *lunch* and *skill*. In a large scale corpus analysis these two aspects would need extensive discussions in order to come to a reliable completion of the analysis. In the present case, however, the corpus was small in size and the variety in the English terms quite restricted. In this research context we actually did not run across these two potential problems. As can be expected, the application of the scheme presented in Figure 1 is more easily done for a small set of experimentally elicited text samples than for big data sets collected from internet sources.

(8) please, plies, plz / greets, greetz, grtz / thanks, thanx, thnx

3 Results

The participants responded strongly to both communicative constraints: writers included far less lexical and orthographic texting features in their message when the distance was large and the costs were high. Statistically there was a large effect of social distance ($F(1,140)=34.50$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.198$) and a medium effect of subjective costs ($F(1,140)=13.36$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.087$; Cohen, 1988: 284). Whether the message was written by a male or female participant, made no difference at all ($F<1$).

Table 1 shows to what extent these effects depended on the origin of the elements. Several results stand out. First, both languages lend text message features less frequently in messages with a large distance or with high costs. Overall, these features showed a drop of 68 and 43 per cent respectively. Second, both languages showed a larger decline in score with social distance than with subjective costs: a drop of 68 per cent versus one of 43 per cent. Third, these declines were larger for the features derived from English than for those originating from Dutch (82 versus 55 percent and 52 versus 33 per cent). As a consequence, the frequency patterns reversed when distance became larger and costs higher: in a context with little constraints (distance small, costs low), English features occurred more frequently than Dutch ones; in a more constrained context the Dutch features prevailed.

Table 1 The average number of lexical and orthographic text message features per single message in relation with Origin of Feature, Social Distance, and Subjective Costs

	Social Distance				Subjective Costs		
	Small	Large	decline		Low	High	decline
Dutch	1.92	0.86	-55%		1.65	1.11	-33%
English	2.28	0.42	-82%		1.81	0.86	-52%
Overall	4.02	1.28	-68%		3.46	1.97	-43%

To get an idea of the repertoire in both languages, an inventory has been made of all words and expressions used by the participants. These features have been classified as either lexical or orthographic on the basis of the subtypes defined in Figure 1. Table 2 presents the results of this qualitative analysis. The main finding was that the difference was small for lexical features (15 versus 20 types), but substantial for orthographic ones (38 versus 10). English showed up most clearly in lexical features, Dutch in orthographic ones.

In Dutch, almost all lexical features functioned as an intensifier, whereas in English a larger array of meanings was expressed with forms ranging from single words (*peace*) to full expressions (*do come see me*). In English, the orthographic features were restricted to a number of rather well known cases, whereas Dutch showed a larger, less familiar set with more diversity: sound spellings (*Kbel je, komde ook?, dacht dak't zou red-den*), letter deletions (*vnmdag, MZZL*) and spelling violations (*gratiz, egt*).

Table 2 Inventory of text message features in relation with Feature Category and Language Origin

	Dutch			English	
	Types	Examples		Types	Examples
Lexical	15	Later!, vet, zo tof, klote, rot, dikke	20		Hey dude, how's life, shotgun, let me know, on stage, hug, good old times
Orthographic	38	Lkkrr, lagge, mss, feesie, Tis hier, gratisj, gistere, toff	10		Haay, CU, LOL, sowwy, grtz, thx

4 Discussion

4.1 Conclusions

When they texted, writers adjusted their linguistic forms to pragmatic constraints presented by the communicative situation. The higher the subjective costs implied by the message and the larger the social distance with the addressee the more they stuck to generally accepted conventions in spelling and word choice.

When they communicated with a peer about a non-intrusive issue, writers were more than happy to insert elements borrowed from English. They used English texting features as defined by Den Ouden en Van Wijk (2007, see figure 1) even more frequently than originally Dutch ones. But when they were less familiar with the addressee and the content brought a heavier burden, they dropped their use of English texting features considerably, and to a larger extent than the extent to which they dropped unconventional uses of their mother tongue. Text message features, and notably the English ones, are reserved for a communicative situation that is rather loose; when the situation becomes pragmatically more demanding, text message features become less frequent and non-Dutch instances tend to be withdrawn faster than Dutch ones.

In Dutch the orthographic texting features clearly outnumbered the lexical ones. In English, however, lexical texting features were most dominant. Apparently, it is far easier to copy full words and expressions from another language than to change their forms. Making and applying orthographic variants demands a level of proficiency in English that may go beyond that of most Dutch texters.

4.2 Whateverism? Deliberate consideration!

The results reported here are in line with David Crystal's (2008) informal observation mentioned earlier. Texters organize their language use with a keen eye on its pragmatics. They keep track of both receiver and content characteristics. In that respect, their behaviour accords with explanations of general frameworks such as language accommodation (Giles, 2008) and linguistic alignment (Branigan, Pickering, Pearson, & McLean, 2010). But an additional determinant should not be overlooked: the symbolic and emotional function of language. This function has been stressed foremost within the field of advertising (Kelly-Holmes, 2000, 2005). More recently Androutsopoulos (2012) has argued for a broader field of application.

Within a specific genre, such as texting, 'a pattern of bilingual discourse' can be found 'in which English is a complementary code used in addition

to ('on top of') the predominant national language for specific discourse functions' (o.c.: 209). 'It is the placement and provenance of such English that is important, not just its semantic equivalents or syntactic integration in the host language' (o.c.: 233). When a texter inserts English words and phrases 'it is not just a case of borrowing, but a strategic language choice for specific text components, which anticipates pragmatic effects on the target audience' (o.c.: 213).

To test this proposal a supplementary analysis has been made post hoc of the positions where the types summarized in Table 2 occurred in the messages. Each message was split into three successive parts: beginning (salutation), core content (invitation, cancellation), and ending (greeting). Table 3 presents the results. The difference between languages is striking ($\chi^2(2)=41.600$, $p<.001$). In Dutch, the larger part of the text message features (85 percent) is to be found in the core content. In English this figure drops to a meager 17 percent. The English features are inserted predominantly at the beginning and ending of the message. Placement seems to be an important consideration. In texting, language mixing comes into play at those positions where the receiver is addressed most personally.

Table 3 Distribution of text message features over the main components of a message

	Dutch	English
Beginning	1 (.02)	15 (.50)
Core content	45 (.85)	5 (.17)
Ending	7 (.13)	10 (.33)

Results reported here conform to those found for newspaper articles (van der Sijs, 2012). In our text messages English words made up less than 5 percent on average, they came from a small set of rather stereotypical items, and the majority of these words got their conventional spelling. In other words, the inclusion of English was no serious threat to the intelligibility of the messages. A far more important finding, however, is that texters used these features in relation with context. They adjusted their language depending on the person they were addressing, and at the same time kept an eye on the content of the message and the position within the text. In this study texters were far from verbal anarchists, they are characterized more rightly so as communication strategists.

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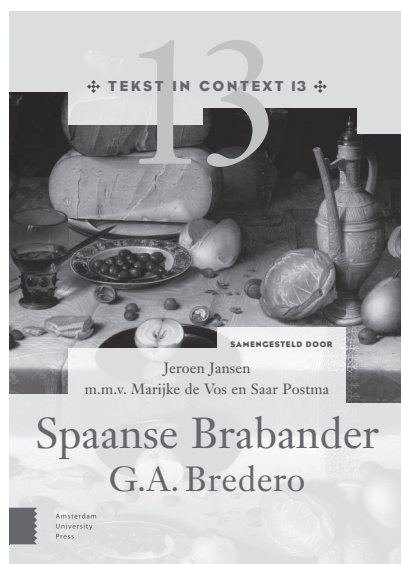
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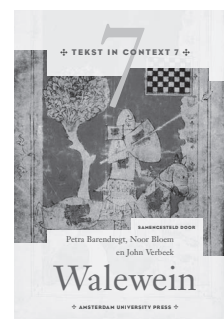
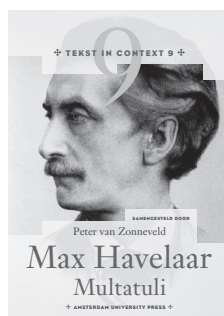
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